

Voluntary Fan Engagement and Information Management on Social Media Platforms: A Korean Pop (K-Pop) Qualitative Case Study

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how voluntary engagement influences K-pop fans' behavioral intention to use social media platforms. As K-pop fandoms continue to grow in global digital spaces, social media has become an important environment for fans to interact, share information, and manage knowledge about their favorite artists. Understanding why fans choose to engage voluntarily helps explain how online fan communities remain active and organized. A qualitative approach was used through passive observation of ten public social media accounts of active K-pop fans weekly, over a three-month period, without interacting with participants, to capture natural and authentic behaviors. The study focused on fan-driven activities such as content creation, participation in voting and streaming campaigns, and interactions within fan communities. Qualitative content analysis was applied to examine posts, comments, shared media, and patterns of engagement. The data were thematically coded to identify intrinsic motivations and recurring forms of information behavior. The findings show that voluntary engagement is mainly driven by emotional connection, creativity, and a sense of community. From an information behavior perspective, fans actively seek, organize, and share fandom-related information through social media. These platforms function as digital knowledge systems where fans collectively create and exchange knowledge. Fans who regularly contributed information and collaborated with others showed stronger intentions to continue using social media for fan activities. This study contributes to research on digital fandom by highlighting voluntary engagement as a key factor in online knowledge sharing and community-based information management within K-pop fandoms. Future research should use mixed methods, examine private fan spaces, consider demographic differences, and explore long-term effects of voluntary engagement.

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INTRODUCTION

Korean pop (K-pop) has grown from its origins in South Korea to become a major global cultural phenomenon (Ranieses, 2024). A key part of this success is the worldwide fan

communities that actively support their favorite idols. Fans use social media to interact with idols, take part in events in real time, and promote the group through fan-driven activities (Roslan et al., 2024a). These platforms also serve as important digital information systems, allowing fans to share knowledge, organize content, and manage information about their idols. The voluntary, active participation of fans in these systems helps spread K-pop across the world (Choi, 2024; Chang et al., 2023; Laffan, 2021). Recent studies also highlight how digital fandom practices, algorithmic visibility, and platform-driven engagement shape fan labor and participatory culture in social media environments (Roslan et al., 2024a; Kim et al., 2023; Yoon & Nam, 2024). However, despite the central role of fan participation in sustaining K-pop's global popularity, it remains unclear how voluntary engagement within these digital environments influences fans' continued use of social media platforms.

Existing studies often focus on fan loyalty, marketing outcomes, or general online engagement (Alexandri, 2024; Chang et al., 2023), but fewer studies examine how voluntary actions contribute to information behavior, knowledge sharing, and sustained platform use. The research problem addressed in this study is how voluntary engagement influences K-pop fans' behavioral intention to use social media as digital information systems. Voluntary engagement, which is driven by personal interest and enjoyment rather than rewards, is an important factor in shaping fans' behavior online (Stegmann et al., 2026; Lan et al., 2025; Scheibe, 2024; Venkatesh et al., 2003). Despite the growing recognition of fan participation in digital spaces, there remains limited understanding of how voluntary engagement specifically shapes fans' continued use of social media platforms. This study therefore aims to bridge this gap by focusing on the role of intrinsic motivation in shaping information management and knowledge-sharing practices within online fandom communities. Academically, this study extends existing technology adoption and information behavior theories by demonstrating how intrinsically motivated participation influences sustained engagement within digital community-based information systems.

Understanding how voluntary engagement works is important for both research and practice. For academics, it shows how information behavior and knowledge sharing occur in online fan communities. For entertainment companies, it provides insights on using digital information systems to engage fans and manage fan-driven content. This study contributes to the literature on fan behavior, social media, and technology use, highlighting the role of voluntary participation in organizing and sharing information within digital communities.

LITERATURE REVIEW

K-Pop Fans Engagement in Social Media

K-pop's global success is driven not only by its music but also by the active and passionate fan communities that surround it, whose participatory practices constitute forms of fan labor and contribute to the creation and maintenance of K-pop culture (Ranieses, 2024). This aligns with scholarship on participatory culture, which emphasizes how fans engage in creative, coordinated, and voluntary activities that support and extend media content beyond its original production.

Fans play a central role in promoting K-pop culture, and their online activities have become integral to the industry's growth (Roslan et al., 2024e). Social media platforms provide the primary space for voluntary participation, allowing fans to support their favorite idols and groups (Nanda & Tjahjani, 2024). Voluntary activities include streaming songs, participating in voting campaigns, creating and sharing fan content, and interacting with other fans, can be understood as forms of fan labor and knowledge work within participatory culture. These actions represent information behaviors where fans organize, manage, and disseminate content, contributing to collective knowledge creation and the sustainability of digital fandom communities.

Through these activities, fans actively contribute to a shared cultural space, reinforcing emotional bonds with artists and fostering a sense of belonging. Studies by Dinningrum & Satiti (2022) and Hayati & Afriani (2022) emphasize how participatory practices such as content creation and interaction strengthen community attachment, while Mohd Jenol & Ahmad Pazil (2022) highlight the role of social media in facilitating fan collaboration and collective support activities. Similarly, Roslan et al. (2025a) argue that fan participation functions as a form of digital labor that contributes to the visibility and promotion of K-pop globally. Together, these studies suggest that fan engagement reflects information behavior, as fans organize, share, and distribute knowledge across communities. However, while most researchers agree that fans are active contributors rather than passive consumers, their analyses primarily focus on cultural participation and promotional outcomes rather than examining how these activities function as structured information management practices or influence continued platform use.

Information Management in Social Media

Social media platforms function as digital information systems, enabling users to create, organize, and share content efficiently (Choi, 2024). Fans utilize these platforms to organize information about their idols, plan and coordinate campaigns, and share knowledge within the fan community. Such activities illustrate core principles of knowledge management, where content is structured, shared, and leveraged for collaborative purposes. Visible voluntary engagement further encourages continued participation, strengthening loyalty and community ties (Upham et al., 2024; Alexandri, 2024; James, 2024).

The interactive nature of social media allows fans to engage in collective actions, including streaming parties and online voting contests, which extend the reach of K-pop worldwide (Hayati & Afriani, 2022). These behaviors highlight fans' information behavior, showing active seeking, creation, and sharing of knowledge. Social media thus serves not only as a platform for personal expression but also as a coordinated knowledge system (Panahi et al., 2021) where fans manage and distribute information for collective benefit.

Within online fan communities, these information management processes operate similarly to organizational knowledge systems, but in a decentralized and voluntary form. Fans assume informal roles such as translators, content curators, data organizers, and campaign coordinators, demonstrating how traditional information management theories such as knowledge sharing, collective intelligence, and collaborative filtering, manifest in fandom environments. Unlike formal organizations, fandoms rely on intrinsic motivation and shared emotional investment

rather than hierarchical control, yet they still achieve efficient coordination and information dissemination. This highlights how online fandoms function as self-organizing knowledge communities, where information management practices emerge organically through shared interests and sustained social interaction.

K-pop Fans' Information Management in Social Media

Voluntary engagement among K-pop fans involves activities that go beyond music consumption, such as producing fan content, organizing events, and coordinating online campaigns (Hayati & Afriani, 2022). Existing studies can be grouped into three main themes: participation practices, knowledge sharing, and coordination of collective activities within online communities. Fans use social media to structure and share information, demonstrating knowledge organization and management practices. These actions fulfill intrinsic motivations related to autonomy, competence, and social connectedness, allowing fans to derive personal satisfaction while contributing to the community (Deci & Ryan, 2012; Galuszka, 2014; Pearson, 2010, as cited in Chen & Skey, 2024). While these studies agree that fans actively manage and circulate information, they often examine these practices separately, leaving limited understanding of how participation, knowledge sharing, and coordination operate together as an integrated information management system.

Understanding why fans continue to use social media platforms requires a framework that considers how users assess the usefulness and ease of use of these digital tools, especially when their engagement is voluntary. Fans' enjoyment, social connection, and ability to manage information effectively increase the perceived value of these platforms (Yoon & Nam, 2024; Venkatesh et al., 2003; Roslan et al., 2024f). By voluntarily creating, sharing, and coordinating content, fans participate in a collaborative digital knowledge ecosystem, sustaining both personal engagement and the broader K-pop fan community. This perspective highlights how fan activities function as both social interactions and information management processes, showing that continued platform use is driven by the interplay of intrinsic motivation, knowledge organization, and community-oriented digital practices.

Research Gap and Rationale

Previous studies on K-pop fandom have examined fan engagement, media use, and social media participation, but few have explored how voluntary fan activities influence continued social media use. Mohd Jenol and Ahmad Pazil (2021) highlight participatory culture, showing fans create content and maintain roles within communities, yet they do not address how these actions function as information behavior or knowledge management.

This study addresses that gap by viewing voluntary engagement as a form of knowledge creation and sharing within digital information systems. Activities such as content creation, coordinating online campaigns, and participating in fan-driven events illustrate collective information practices. By linking these actions to fans' behavioral intention, the study shows how social media supports information management, community knowledge exchange, and sustained engagement.

In summary, past research emphasizes fan participation and culture but overlooks the role of voluntary engagement in managing, sharing, and organizing knowledge. This study fills that gap by framing K-pop fandom activities as information behavior that drives both social media use and community knowledge practices.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative content analysis approach to examine how voluntary engagement influences K-pop fans' intentions to use social media. Specifically, the research analyzes posts, comments, likes, shares, and other fan-driven content on public social media accounts weekly, over a three-month period. Observing these digital interactions allows the study to investigate how fans manage, organize, and share information, which types of content they engage with, and the patterns of participation within online fandom communities.

By explicitly using qualitative content analysis, the study clarifies the method for examining fan behaviors as information management and knowledge-sharing practices, providing a structured framework for analyzing digital fan engagement. The observation solely as a data collection technique, ensuring consistency throughout the document.

Participants

The analysis focuses on publicly available content rather than direct interaction with individuals. The social media accounts chosen in this study are K-pop fans who actively engage in fandom activities on social media. Using purposive sampling, the study selects social media account users who identify as K-pop fans and frequently use platforms like X. To capture a variety of information behaviors, the study includes social media accounts with different levels of social media activity, follower counts, and involvement in fandom communities.

Data Collection

Data for this study has been collected by observing social media accounts and activities weekly, over a three-month period. A total of ten (10) social media accounts examined with the content shared by fans, including posts, photos, videos, comments, likes, and shares related to K-pop. Observations has been conducted passively, without interacting with participants, to capture natural and authentic behaviors. All the evidence has been captured as screenshots and organized into thematic groups for observational analysis.

Data Analysis

The data analysis for this study used qualitative content analysis to explore themes, patterns, and trends in the social media activities of K-pop fans. The researcher thoroughly examined the observed content to identify recurring themes in the types of posts shared, the frequency of

posting, levels of engagement and interactions with other users or fandom communities. The purpose of observing frequency and engagement metrics is to verify that behaviors are consistent and repetitive across K-pop fans. The data has been systematically organized using thematic coding, which helps to group similar behaviors and highlight both commonalities and unique differences among participants. This method allows for a deeper understanding of the underlying trends and insights revealed through the data. Selected posts are used as representative samples to illustrate broader patterns within each theme.

RESULTS

The thematic analysis of the social media content provided insights into the role of voluntary engagement in shaping the behavioral intention of K-pop fans to use social media platforms such as content creation, collective participation, and community building. The analysis revealed several recurring themes in the fan behaviors observed, which are discussed below.

Voluntary Content Creation

The collaborative creation of a guidebook by Malaysian fans for TheBoyz, a popular K-pop group, illustrates voluntary content creation within the fandom. The guidebook contains information about Malaysian foods, local phrases, and cultural customs prepared for the group's visit. The project was independently organized by fan clubs, where fans contributed materials such as written descriptions, designs, and cultural information. The content was shared and coordinated through social media and digital platforms, allowing fans to compile and distribute the guidebook within the online community. Figure 1 shows selected pages created by the fans.

In this study, the guidebook example demonstrates a form of voluntary content creation observed among fans within the community. By using social media to plan, organize, and share the guidebook, fans demonstrated their intention to keep participating on these platforms. This activity reflects information management and knowledge sharing, as fans structure, distribute, and coordinate content within the community. It also highlights how voluntary participation, driven by intrinsic motivation and a sense of collective purpose, supports ongoing involvement and strengthens both social connections and digital information practices within K-pop fandoms.



Figure 1: Malaysian Guidebook for TheBoyz Visits

Voluntary Participation in Collective Activities

Figure 2 shows the donation drive organized by @THE_BOYZMY for THE BOYZ WORLD TOUR ZENERATION II in Kuala Lumpur. This initiative is a strong example of voluntary participation in collective activities, as fans willingly contributed toward a shared goal. Participants, both local and international, chose to donate out of genuine dedication and emotional connection to the group. Through social media, they coordinated their efforts, shared information about the drive, and tracked contributions, reflecting information behavior and knowledge management within the fandom.

The drive also highlights how fans organize knowledge and share information to achieve collective outcomes. Fans tracked donations, provided instructions for participation, and communicated progress through posts and messages, showing structured information management and purposeful digital coordination. These behaviors reflect information behavior on how fans actively collect, process, and use information and knowledge sharing, as they ensured others could easily participate. Social media platforms acted as digital information systems, enabling fans to manage content, coordinate actions, and support collective decision-making efficiently.



Figure 2: Donation Drive for TheBoyz Fan Project Concert

Finally, the initiative strengthened community ties and a sense of belonging. Fans' intrinsic motivation drove their participation, fostering solidarity and collective pride. The example demonstrates how voluntary contributions, supported by digital platforms and organized through fan networks, sustain engagement, encourage ongoing collaboration, and enhance the overall experience of fandom activities.

Voluntary Social Interactions and Community Building

The recruitment effort by @cheerysohn, as shown in Figure 3, for crew members to help with the Eric cup sleeve event in Kuala Lumpur was conducted through a public post on social media. Fans responded by commenting on the post and communicating through direct messages to confirm their participation. Interactions included exchange information about the event preparation, discussing responsibilities, and sharing updates related to the cupsleeve event,

demonstrating information behavior and knowledge organization. The use of social media as a digital information system enables fans to share updates, manage contributions, and collaborate efficiently, reflecting knowledge sharing practices that strengthen both community bonds and engagement in fandom activities.



Figure 3: Crew Recruitment for Fan Projects

This example reflects voluntary participation, as fans are motivated by their personal interest and dedication to supporting the Eric cup sleeve event rather than any obligation. By creating a space for interaction and collaboration, @cheerysohn's initiative allows fans to share information, organize tasks, and work together on meaningful projects, demonstrating knowledge organization, information behavior, and knowledge sharing. Using social media as a digital information system, fans strengthen community connections, coordinate activities, and maintain engagement. These voluntary interactions play a key role in building a vibrant fan community and enhancing the collective experience within the K-pop fandom.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study add to the growing research on fan behavior, social media usage, and voluntary engagement, especially within K-pop fandoms. The results show that voluntary engagement is very important for fans' intention to use social media platforms. Fans' participation is driven by intrinsic motivation, which shapes how they interact digitally and how they manage and share information within their fandom communities. These findings are significant because they support the study objective of examining how voluntary engagement influences behavioral intention to use social media. They also highlight how fan activities on social media function as information management and knowledge-sharing practices within digital fan communities.

One key contribution of this study is showing that intrinsic motivation drives voluntary fan engagement. Unlike previous research that mainly focused on external rewards or promotional outcomes (Roslan et al., 2024a), this study highlights how fans' internal satisfaction influences

their participation in managing and sharing information within fandom spaces. This finding extends earlier studies by demonstrating that intrinsic motivation not only supports fan participation but also shapes how fans organize, coordinate, and distribute information through social media platforms. This supports Deci & Ryan's (2000) self-determination theory, which explains that intrinsic motivation is essential for maintaining long-term engagement. Fans' emotional connection to K-pop idols and their sense of community (Roslan et al., 2024e) influence how they use social media as a platform to organize, share, and manage information related to their fandom activities. By linking intrinsic motivation with information management practices, this study adds a new perspective to existing research that has largely examined fan engagement from cultural or marketing viewpoints rather than from an information behavior perspective.

Another important finding is the role of social media platforms in creating a sense of community among K-pop fans. Fans engage in voluntary activities such as content creation, voting campaigns (Hayati & Afriani, 2022), and interacting with other fans through posts and comments. These activities involve organizing, storing, and distributing information about idols and fandom events, allowing fans to coordinate campaigns and maintain shared knowledge across the community. These actions not only strengthen their emotional connection to idols but also build bonds with fellow fans (Roslan, 2024). This shows that social media platforms act as digital information systems that support knowledge sharing, collective action, and information management within fan communities (Roslan et al., 2024d). This highlights that fan engagement is not only social but also involves systematic practices of information organization and dissemination.

Finally, the study suggests that voluntary engagement affects how useful fans perceive social media platforms to be (Roslan et al., 2025b), which in turn shapes their intention to continue using them. This aligns with the information systems or management theories which emphasize that perceived benefits influence technology adoption (Venkatesh et al., 2003). For K-pop fans, the advantages gained from voluntary participation—such as a sense of achievement, emotional satisfaction, and social connectedness—enhance their intention to continue using social media. This highlights how voluntary engagement supports information behavior, knowledge sharing, and the use of digital systems to sustain fandom activity and community interaction.

CONCLUSION

Following Roslan et al. (2024c), this study focused on K-pop fans' behaviour to understand how voluntary engagement affects their intention to use social media. Activities such as content creation, voting campaigns (Hayati & Afriani, 2022), and online interactions not only show fans' commitment but also help organize and distribute knowledge within the fandom. Fans voluntarily contribute by sharing updates, strategies, or creative content, forming a community knowledge base.

This study highlights the practical role of social media platforms as digital knowledge ecosystems. These platforms enable fans to collaborate, share information, and create collective

knowledge about idols, events, and fan activities. By providing spaces for discussion, resource sharing, and coordinated participation, social media platforms facilitate digital knowledge exchange and collaborative learning. Fans' voluntary engagement strengthens these ecosystems by making knowledge accessible, organizing information, and encouraging participation from diverse members of the fan community.

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. The research is based on a qualitative approach, focusing on publicly available social media content, which limits the scope of fan engagement observed. As a result, the study does not capture the full range of fan activities, particularly those that occur within private or semi-private groups (e.g., closed fan communities or private messaging groups). Additionally, the study's reliance on a small sample of fans may limit the generalizability of the findings to the broader K-pop fandom. The analysis also did not explore demographic variables such as age, location, or fandom duration, which could have influenced the nature of fans' voluntary engagement.

Future research could address these limitations by adopting a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative observations with quantitative surveys or interviews to provide a more comprehensive understanding of voluntary engagement in K-pop fandoms. Additionally, examining fans in private, closed fan groups could offer deeper insights into how engagement occurs in less public spaces. Researchers could also explore the role of demographic factors, such as the fan's geographical location or length of engagement with the fandom, in shaping voluntary engagement. Lastly, future studies could investigate the long-term effects of voluntary engagement on fan loyalty and brand advocacy, particularly in relation to the broader influence of social media in the digital age.

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